

Approved Minutes

TOWN OF MANSFIELD COMMUNICATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Monday, May 18, 2009
Audrey Beck Municipal Building

Members Present: Aline Booth, Joyce Crepeau, Leila Fecho, Patrick McGlamery, Toni Moran, Richard Pellegrine

Elected Officials and Staff Present: Jaime Russell

- I. **Meeting Called to order** at 7:05p by chairperson Moran
- II. **Approval of Minutes** – With changes, minutes approved unanimously.
- III. **Public Comment** – Resident Betty Wassmundt of 54 Old Turnpike Road shared that the Town Council is eager to hear our recommendations. Recognizing one way Mansfield could achieve greater citizen participation in governance is by improving communications, Ms. Wassmundt offered some specifics for the committee to consider regarding signage and the web site. She noted a very nice, readable, glass-enclosed sign announcing events in front of the school on 32 in Willington. Maybe we should consider signs like this in front of the three grammar schools, MMS and Town offices. She felt that the A-frame signs posted for the Town Meeting were less legible than the FFA plant sale signs (too much lettering and letters too small on Town signs). She noted the antiquated sign posts around town are still used, and recommended if they are to continue using them, maybe consider using color-coordinated paper to designate different types of events/meetings and the use of larger font to catch the reader's eye from a distance (for example, "Town Meeting" in large print, followed by the standard text on bright purple paper, "Region 19 Referendum" on bright red paper...). And, in today's technological world, we need to rely more on the web site. Her recommendation is that we propose training for citizens on how to navigate the Town site. Some specific recommendations of web site content to be posted to enable open, transparent government: policy and procedure manuals, contracts (i.e., Town Manager, Finance Director), and negotiated agreements with the unions. Ms. Wassmundt reiterated her offer to volunteer to help the Town post information to the web site.
- IV. **Old Business** –
 - A. **Budget Process – 1. Regular Budget** – For the sake of clarity, the following terms used for the documents published by the Town: "Citizen's Budget Guide" refers to the 4-pg document created/published for the first time this February, describing the budget process and timeline, modeled after the Windsor document we reviewed with Town Manager Matt Hart 12/15/08; "Budget in Brief" 4-pg document mailed for the first time this year to residents immediately prior to the Town Meeting; "5/12 Council Adopted Budget Packet" 40+pg/1.3mb PDF packet distributed with purple cover at the Town Meeting; "Full Budget Document" which is the complete 337-pg/17mb PDF document.

Chairperson Moran will draft a letter to the Council commending the Town's effort to encourage participation in the Town Meeting. Ads ran in the Chronicle. "Budget in Brief" document mailed to homes, done in part as a direct response to our recommendation. We applaud the mailing and the clarity of the content provided. We further recommend the continued promotion of "how to make a motion" by including the Budget in Brief document as the first item in the table of contents in the "5/12 Council Adopted Budget Packet" so the reader's level of confidence (comfort and recognition) is enhanced.

To promote transparent governance, the budget documents need to be available to the public earlier in the process. The "Citizen's Budget Guide" should be more widely distributed to encourage early participation in the process. The "Budget in Brief" was available this year (on Web) about a week prior to the Town Meeting, the "5/12 Council Adopted Budget Packet" by Wednesday (four days prior to the meeting) and the Full Budget Document by Thursday (three days prior to the meeting). Printed copies of the purple packet were available at the Town Offices by Friday (two days prior to the meeting). We strongly recommend that the printed documents be available earlier, relative to the fixed date of the Town Meeting. We discussed that if printed documents were available in multiple locations on Friday (Thursday distribution), that might suffice. Locations to include, minimally: Town Hall, all schools, community center, senior center, and the library.

Email notification (requiring Q-notify list-serve opt-in) sent on Monday with the link to the site and mention to arrive early to check in with ID could have been sent out several days earlier (if documents posted to web site by Wed, Q-notify should be scheduled to go out on same day rather than three days later).

The Town Meeting venue/process improvements noticed and commended, especially the projection of the motions on the floor. Recommend further promote "written motions will greatly facilitate the process" as the one written motion, handed to the keyboardist was processed smoothly and professionally. NOT that all motions must be submitted in writing, but recommend some wording of the motion be written to facilitate the process of projecting the motion as intended.

2. Referendum Process – If the petition for referendum is validated, we strongly recommend the signs be simplified for legibility and posted in high-traffic areas as recommended previously.

- B. **Membership Issues** – No news to report. One vacancy still exists.
- C. **New Media** – Mr. McGlamery offered to bring a process recommendation to the June 1st meeting to flush out the communications channels list with additional details.

V. **New Business**

Survey – Communications Preference Survey implemented at the Town Meeting. Response was positive and participation greater than anticipated. We discussed how to compile and analyze data. If there is a referendum, we should absolutely offer the same (minor text changes) survey to the voters after they vote. To ensure we collect data from a good cross-section of our citizens, we feel it important to offer the opportunity to take the survey to all who come to vote, recognizing we should expect a lower response rate than at the Town Meeting. Aline Booth motioned and Patrick seconded the motion that Chairperson Moran request approval for the survey from the appropriate officials. All were in favor. Implementation details to be discussed as needed at our next meeting.

5/6/09 Referral on Open and Transparent Government – We have several questions for Mr. Haddad to clarify their expectations. Chairperson Moran will report back to the committee regarding the scope of the recommendations, strategy vs. policy, and level of detail expected for October presentation to Town Council.

NEXT MEETING: June 1st in Conference Room B.

VI. **Reports** – no additional reports

VII. **Communications** –

As listed above, 5/6/09 Referral received and distributed as part of tonight's agenda packet.

VIII. **Adjournment** – Motion made by Ms. Fecho, seconded by Ms. Crepeau; meeting adjourned at 9:02p.

Respectfully Submitted, 5/20/09

Leila Fecho, Secretary pro tem